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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DJIBOUTI 001212

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STATE FOR AF DAS DON YAMAMOTO AND AF/E  
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE FOR ISA AFRICA DAS THERESE WHELAN  
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE ALSO FOR DSCA JEANNE FARMER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/16/2014  
TAGS: MARR MOPS MCAP PREL PINR FR DJ  
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S INTRODUCTORY CALL ON NEW COMMANDER OF  
FRENCH FORCES IN DJIBOUTI

Classified By: AMBASSADOR MARGUERITA D.RAGSDALE.  
REASONS 1.4 (A) AND (D).

11. (U) Ambassador, accompanied by USLO Chief, had her first meeting September 16 with General Michel Arrault, the new Commander of French Forces in Djibouti. Arrault replaced General Gerard Pons, whose tour of duty ended August 1.

12. (C) Ambassador noted the close cooperation and collaboration between the U.S. and France in Djibouti and the weekly meetings she had had with General Pons. She told Arrault, that with his permission, she wished to continue this weekly contact. Arrault concurred and noted that he had had the privilege to meet as well General Samuel Helland, Commander of the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA). Arrault said he looked forward to working closely with us. Ambassador noted the role of the CJTF-HOA in the global war on terrorism, but acknowledged the difference in function of France's military presence in Djibouti. Arrault responded that France's forces are in Djibouti as part of a mutual defense agreement with Djibouti that has existed since Djibouti's independence. Its mission is therefore different. Arrault noted that France had, on occasion, had the chance to participate with the CTF-150, but that its primary role in Djibouti is defense of Djibouti rather than the global war on terrorism.

13. (C) Ambassador asked about France's military assistance to Djibouti, noting our own Foreign Military Financing (FMF) program here. Arrault said France does have training and exercise programs with Djibouti but that their direct assistance amounts to 30 million euros (approximately USD 45 million) annually, a figure which is provided through a complicated computation that includes rent for France's 8 plus bases in Djibouti, taxes and other duties accruing to servicemen, plus cash that would bring any shortfalls on an annual basis up to this sum.

14. (C) Ambassador remarked that the U.S. military was in the process of negotiating renewal of its Camp Lemonier lease, currently assessed at USD 15 million annually. She noted her understanding that France wanted to reserve a portion of land near the Camp for use for aircraft parking and staff billeting. She asked if France had reached an agreement with Djibouti on this issue. Arrault responded that France has had an agreement in principle with Djibouti since December 2003 for the land in question, and that "Ambassador Selz (France's Ambassador in Djibouti) is pushing to conclude the matter." Arrault went on to note "confusion" about the property as the precise area that the property encompasses "keeps changing." (Note: Both Ambassador and USLO Chief have seen a diplomatic note from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Djibouti which discusses an understanding between France and Djibouti on the matter of the land, but the evidence seems clear that there is no signed agreement between the sides. No such formal agreement was signed during the visit in July of France's Defense Minister. In addition, Arrault's reference to changing land parameters would not indicate the existence of a binding formal agreement. End note.)

15. (C) Ambassador spoke of the advantage that Arrault had as a newcomer in sharing a common language -- French -- with his military and political interlocutors. She alluded to the clarity of intent that this would afford Arrault in his daily interactions with Djiboutians. Arrault responded that the sharing of French was not such an advantage in reality. He said he found it difficult to understand some of the Afars and Issas with whom he spoke because of the different ways in which they used French. In some instances, it was difficult to comprehend what exactly they were trying to communicate. In his view, the differences among Djiboutians ethnically were not bridged, unfortunately, by this common language of French.

16. (U) BIO-DATA ON MICHEL ARRAULT (as provided): General Michel Arrault was born November 10, 1952. He entered the Air Force Academy and obtained his rating as a fighter pilot in March, 1976. From 1976 to 1986, he flew the Mirage II and the Mirage F-1 and took command of an air defense fighter squadron in 1985. During the Summer of 1986, he was

positioned in the Office of the Inspector General of the Air Force in Paris, where he held the position of Deputy for Inspection, Fighter Operations. In 1987, he was assigned to the 11th Tactical Fighter Wing, flying the Jaguar, and was Wing Commander in August, 1989. After an Air War College course, he was assigned to Incirlik Air Force base Turkey, to assume the command of French forces attached to Turkey for "Provide Comfort" international operation. He then took on the position of Deputy Commander of the Air Force Academy on June 1, 1992 and was responsible for all training programs for cadets. In 1995, General Arrault was assigned as Base Commander at Luxeuil Air Force Base, operating the Mirage 2000N in a nuclear deterrence role. In 1997, he was positioned to the French Joint Headquarters, Paris, as capability manager in the nuclear forces department. After a course with the "Centre des Hautes Etudes Militaires" in Paris, he was appointed as French Forces Commander in Chad. During the Summer of 2002, he was transferred to the Secretariat General for National Defense, Paris, as Deputy

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for International and Strategic Affairs. He was appointed French Forces Commander in Djibouti. General Arrault has more than 3900 flying hours on several combat aircraft: Alphajet, Mirage II, Mirage F1, Jaguar and Mirage 2000. His awards and decorations include Officer in the Legion of Honor, Commander in the "National Order of Merit," the "Medaille de l'Aeronautique and the Legion of Merit of the United States of America. General Arrault is married with two children.

**¶7. (C) Comment:** General Arrault has limited English and is, therefore, more comfortable in French. He has a less intense style than that of his predecessor General Pons, which may make for less intensity on the very issues of access to which Pons was so committed during his tenure here. End comment.

RAGSDALE